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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1983
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 6583
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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 8649
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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002318

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SUBJECT: RAHUL GANDHI ON GOVERNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INDIA'S
FOREIGN POLICY

REF: NEW DELHI 1624

Classified By: Ambassador Timothy Roemer. Reasons: 1.4(B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a lengthy one-on-one meeting on November 16, Indian Congress Party General Secretary and MP Rahul Gandhi expressed interest in U.S. perspectives on India's quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. He dismissed any rumors of a Cabinet shake-up and focused on the UPA government's rural development programs, touching on the Naxalite threat. Gandhi plans to send a letter to the Secretary soon offering his views on developments in Afghanistan. End Summary.

PM's Visit

¶2. (C) In an hour plus meeting at Gandhi's private residence, the Ambassador flagged the Prime Minister's upcoming state visit and asked Gandhi what his views were on the bilateral agenda. Gandhi agreed that the two leaders should discuss Afghanistan and Pakistan, nonproliferation, China and the bilateral Strategic Dialogue. Gandhi was interested in U.S. perspectives on a permanent UN Security Council seat for India. Ambassador Roemer noted that the U.S. was continuing to review Security Council reform with a focus on how to assure the Council's effectiveness. Observing that cooperation had improved between our UN delegations in New York, Roemer pointed out that India had a low voting coincidence with the U.S. and asked Gandhi what India's approach might be to difficult Security Council issues such as Iran, the DPRK and nonproliferation.

Governing and Development

¶3. (C) Gandhi touched on his recent party building efforts and the intersection between governance and development. He dismissed any talk of a Cabinet shake-up, acknowledging that he would know if one were in the works and said that he "hadn't heard of any such moves." Gandhi focused on the UPA's efforts at rural development, observing that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) had been very successful overall, but had been unevenly implemented. (Note: NREGS is the Singh government's flagship program to provide 100 days of employment in rural areas to poor

families at a guaranteed wage.) Looking more broadly at development efforts in India, Gandhi said that India had lessons to offer other countries in development, taking into account both its successes and failures.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Roemer stressed USG interest in working closely with India and Gandhi on rural development issues. Gandhi responded by urging the U.S. to get the right mix in its messaging on development efforts. It was crucial to use the right language in talking about the poor and development as well as in reaching out visibly to the poor. He advised that if the President were to visit India, it would be significant if he made some rhetorical or symbolic gestures that acknowledged India's poor. (Comment: Gandhi's frequent visits to poor rural households have been criticized by political opponents as grandstanding, but he has responded by pointing out that the poor are largely invisible on the political scene and that he is trying to get an idea of the "real" India. End Comment.)

Naxalite Challenge

¶5. (C) Turning to the threat of Naxalite violence, Gandhi said that the underlying cause of the violence was a "political disconnect" between the poor and land owners. He cited government efforts to support development in Naxal-prone areas, such as NREGS and a central government program to provide all-weather roads to connect even remote villages, but acknowledged implementation problems. He

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observed that social welfare programs in the U.S. were based on providing individuals benefits, while in India, benefits were parceled out on an ethnic (or caste) basis. India's goal should be to move to a focus on providing help to individuals.

Afghanistan

¶6. (C) Gandhi noted that he was drafting a letter to Secretary Clinton offering views on developments in Afghanistan. He said he would focus on India's own development experience with programs like NREGS. He took on board the Ambassador's point about the challenges of delivering assistance in Afghanistan and promised to share a draft of the letter with the Ambassador before sending it to the Secretary.

Comment

¶7. (C) Rahul Gandhi is clearly interested in reaching out to the USG; in the past, he was an elusive contact, but this is the third substantive meeting he has had with the Ambassador since late July. The Ambassador will also be meeting with a group of young parliamentarians in early December following the Prime Minister's U.S. visit to further our efforts at building constituencies in support of the strategic partnership.
ROEMER